

MEETING OF THE PERMIT EFFICIENCY TASK FORCE

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2005 7:00 P.M.
TWIN PINES SENIOR AND COMMUNITY CENTER
20 TWIN PINES LANE
(FORMERLY, 1223 RALSTON AVENUE)**

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Planning and Community Development Director Craig Ewing

1. ROLL CALL

Dave Warden, Phil Mathewson, Bill Dickenson, Rick Frautschi, Jacki Horton, Steve Simpson, Brian Korn, Jerry Steinberg, Colette Sylver, Ken Hall, and Will Markle. (Staff present: Director Craig Ewing, Building Official Mark Nolfi, and Principal Planner Carlos de Melo)

2. AGENDA AMENDMENTS

No amendments.

3. CONSENT CALENDAR

No consent items.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Introduction and Purpose of Task Force

Mayor Warden discussed the genesis of the Task Force. The committee members introduced themselves and related a personal experience with government.

b. Selection of Chair and Vice-chair

Bill Dickenson was elected Chair and Ken Hall was elected Vice-chair, both by acclamation.

c. Review of Notebook Materials

Director Ewing reviewed the materials contained in the notebooks previously delivered to the Task Force. The Council memorandum of December 28, 2004 provided a 'road map' through the project, including a mid-course check-in with the City Council. The project would end with a set of recommendations from the Task Force regarding improvement to the permitting process. In response to a question about the nature of the recommendations, Ewing indicated that three types of recommendations are likely to be identified: Administrative improvements, increased resources, and policy / ordinance amendments. The Task Force discussed issues they wanted included in the project:

- Consistency of Information Provided at Public Counter
- Clarity in Explaining the Process / Benefits of a Project Manager

- Consistency in Treatment by the City Council
- Predictability of the Rules Over the Course of the Project
- Matrix of How Other Cities Review Projects
- Synthesis of All Experiences – Providing a Set of Recommendations

Ewing reviewed the various performance reports from Belmont, San Mateo, Belvedere, and Berkeley. He noted that each report was tailored to the political and regulatory environment of the subject city:

- The Report on the Belmont Permit Task Force in 2000 appeared to focus on problems with obtaining a building permit – the Planning Commission review of single family homes had been in place only a few months
- Management Partners Report on Belmont in late 2001 made 33 recommendations, including creation of a one-stop center and reducing the number of required submittals.

The Task Force discussed some of the recommendations, noting that the Owner / Builder workshops were valuable, but that a similar workshop needs to be developed for zoning approvals; that a template package is needed, including required plans and reports; that design guidelines would be helpful; that the system should work for both professionals and novices. The Task Force also identified the following concerns with the Belmont system:

- Time it Takes to Get Approvals (Excess Length of Time)
- Consistency in Information Dissemination
- CD-ROM- 4 Routes to Take?
- Political Dynamics – Changing Councils – Need for a period of Stability

Ewing continued his report on other cities' studies with a summary of the staff report by the City of San Mateo on their process. He indicated that they identified their neighborhood review component as a problem.

The Task Force discussed the Belmont Neighborhood Outreach component, with a general sense that it seemed to work well.

Ewing reviewed the Belvedere report, noting that outside plan check created delays there and that they reported problems with having only part-time professional planning services on staff and the inconsistent use of variance findings.

The Task Force discussed the importance of consistency in permit processing, noting that some consistency issues resulted in higher application costs for all. One example was the requirement for site surveys on all applications.

Ewing summarized the report from the City of Berkeley where they identified problems with multi-layered review bodies, *ex-parte* communications and the hearing notification requirements (deemed excessive by some). For Belmont, he noted that the City has begun use of a Teleminder service that provides automated telephone messaging for project notification.

d. Discussion of Outreach Strategy to Previous Permit Applicants

Ewing reviewed the proposed work plan and suggested tasks for the next meeting. He reported that a survey was being prepared for mailing to recent permit applicants and that follow-up interviews would be conducted by the Task Force at their next meeting. From that feedback, the Task Force would develop a list of top concerns and problems from which it would prepare its report to Council.

The Task Force discussed the need for a detailed interview and concluded that a mailed survey would be sufficient to back up the Task Force's own experiences and observations about Belmont's permitting procedures. The Task Force asked that the following be incorporated into the survey:

- Keep simple and open-ended
- Add contractors to mailing list
- Send to Neighborhood Associations
- Send responses to Task Force members
- Put surveys on public counter

The Task Force generally discussed its observations on Belmont's permitting system:

- Design review takes too long to get before the Planning Commission
- Review of geologic reports by the Planning Commission is unnecessary.
- Global changes to City rules should be considered; challenge 'sacred cows'
- Interim (staff or sub-committee of Commission) level of review is needed.
- A year to obtain a building permit is too long.
- Projects are reviewed to assure that neighborhoods and property values are protected.

Ewing stated that the problems and recommendations would likely fall into one of three types:

- Administration – how staff provides information, interacts with the public and supports the process
- Thresholds for Review – what projects should be subject to review and who should review them (staff, Planning Commission, other hearing body)
- Approval Policies – what criteria should be used to evaluate projects (issues subject to review, findings, conditions of approval, etc.)

5. NEXT MEETING

The Task Force agreed that its next meeting would be Wednesday, May 11th at 7 p.m. in the Belmont Senior and Community Center.

6. COMMUNITY FORUM (Public Comments)

(No speakers)

7. ADJOURNMENT